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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 001059

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/MAG (SWILLIAMS, MNARDI, VSTEWART)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: RULING RCD PARTY RESHUFFLES THE TOP

REF: A. TUNIS 958
[1](#)B. TUNIS 879
[1](#)C. TUNIS 859

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Following President Zine el Abdidine Ben Ali's Cabinet reshuffle, the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) announced changes in the leadership of its Political Bureau (PB) September 5. In Tunisia, Cabinet Ministers fall somewhere behind the members of the RCD Political Bureau in political influence. Ben Ali governs through his immediate Minister Advisors or "shadow cabinet" in the Palace, then through the RCD, then through the regular ministerial structures of the government. Ben Ali chose the nine members of the RCD PB from among the 343 members of the RCD Central Committee.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ben Ali is the President of the RCD. Since 1999, when Mohamed Ghannouchi replaced Hamed Karoui as Prime Minister, there have been two RCD vice-presidents because Ben Ali did not want to remove Karoui, a key ally, and thus created a second vice-president position. This year the RCD finally decided to eliminate one of the two positions and Karoui, now in his eighties, retired. The second important move was the naming of Mohamed Ghariani, 46, as Secretary General of the party replacing Hedi M'Henni who has been Secretary General since 2005. Ghariani has been active in party politics since 1983 and has been a member of the RCD Central Committee since 1993. In 1995 he was named the RCD Permanent Secretary for Youth. Since January 2007 he has served as Minister Advisor to the President, or the shadow "Minister of Interior." Previously he was Ambassador to London 2005-2007.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The other members of the RCD political bureau are holdovers. The first three were named to the PB in 2006 and the rest are long-time members of the RCD inner circle:
--Ahmed Iyadh Ouederni, 55, Chief-of-Staff to the President
--Abdelwaheb Abdallah, 68, Minister of Foreign Affairs
--Rafik Belhaj Kacem, 59, Minister of Interior
--Abdallah Kallel, 65, RCD Treasurer, President of the Chamber of Advisors 2005-2008, previously Minister of Interior in the early 1990's
--Foued M'Bazaa, 75, former parliamentarian until 1997, and President of the Chamber of Deputies since 1999;
--Abdalaziz Ben Dhia, 72, Minister Advisor to the President and shadow Prime Minister

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: Ben Ali's naming of Ghariani as Secretary General follows other indications that the President is trying to bring some new blood into the heart of the government. The other major indication was the composition of the RCD Central Committee in August where the President placed an emphasis on bringing younger members into the Central Committee (Ref B) by bringing in 63 new members under the age of 30. End Comment.

